

made it strong, at least in theory, in dealing with the economic transactions of the individual. In the earlier Middle Ages it had stood for the protection of peaceful labour, for the care of the poor, the unfortunate and the oppressed—for the ideal, at least, of social solidarity against the naked force of violence and oppression. With the growing complexity of economic civilization, it was confronted with problems not easily handled by its traditional categories. But, if applied capriciously, they were not renounced, and the world of economic morality, which baffles us to-day, was in its turn converted by it into a new, though embarrassing, opportunity. Whatever emphasis may be laid—and emphasis can hardly be too strong—upon the gulf between theory and practice, the qualifications stultifying principles, and the casuistry by which the work of canonists, not less than of other lawyers, was disfigured, the endeavour to draw the most commonplace of human activities and the least tractable of human appetites within the all-embracing circle of a universal system still glows through it all with a certain tarnished splendour. When the distinction between that which is permissible in private life and that which is permissible in business offers so plausible an escape from the judgment pronounced on covetousness, it is something to have insisted that the law of charity is binding on

the second
not less than on the first. When the
austerity of
principles can be evaded by treating them as
applicable
only to those relations of life in which their
application
is least exacting, it is something to have
attempted
to construct a system tough enough to
stand against
commercial unscrupulousness, but yet
sufficiently elastic
to admit any legitimate transaction. If it
is proper to
insist on the prevalence of avarice and
greed in high
places, it is not less important to observe
that men
called these vices by their right names,
and had not
learned to persuade themselves that greed
was enter-
prise and avarice economy.